



Selected Poems

Edna St. Vincent Millay

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A magnificent anthology of the finest works of Edna St. Vincent Millay, perhaps the premier American lyricist of the twentieth century.

Selected Poems Details

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From Reader Review Selected Poems for online ebook

Kbrooke says

So many poems I would like to print out on small cards, laminate, and then hand to every guy I've ever dated.

Aidan Collins says

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

Elia says

Who doesn't love *First Fig*?:

*My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends-
It gives a lovely light!*

But my favorite Millay poem (so far) is actually *Modern Declaration*. Otherwise I haven't found that many poems here that I come back to, but I have the same attitude towards books of poetry that I have towards cook books, if just one poem (or recipe) in a book becomes **yours** then the book has earned its price of admission.

Emily says

I bought a beautiful little 1929 leather bound book of Millay's poems this Saturday at the Allentown Book and Paper Show. The endpapers are pale spotted watercolor and the inside edge of the cover is bordered in a

gold pattern. When you read the poems they are framed so lovely by it. The spine of this slim volume is raised in the traditional way. What a wonderful book! I read it through and savored every poem. Some it seemed were written just for me in that moment.

mwpm says

"The best of Millay's virtuoso sonnets and short lyrics in a selection that spans her entire career." (from the back cover) Indeed, the American Poets Project selection of Millay's poetry includes the best of *Renascence and Other Poems* (such as "Afternoon on a Hill"), *A Few Figs from Thistles* (such as "First Fig"), *Second April* (such as "Alms"), *The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems* (such as "Autumn Chant"), *The Buck in the Snow* (such as "To Inez Milholland"), *The King's Henchman*, *Wine from These Grapes* (such as "The Solid Sprite Who Stands Alone"), *Conversation at Midnight*, *Huntsman, What Quarry?* (such as "Fontaine, Je Ne Boirai Pas De Ton Eau!"), *Make Bright the Arrows* (such as "Make bright the arrows"), *The Murder of Lidice* ("They marched them out to the public square"), and *Mine the Harvest* (such as "For Warmth Alone, for Shelter Only")...

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.

- Afternoon on a Hill (from *Renascence and Other Poems*)

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends -
It gives a lovely light!

- First Fig (from *A Few Figs from Thistles*)

There was a time I stood and watched
The small, ill-natured sparrows' fray;
I loved the beggar that I fed,
I cared for what he had to say,

I stood and watched him out of sight;
Today I reach around the door
And set a bowl upon the step;
My heart is what it was before,

But it is winter with your love;
I scatter crumbs upon the sill,
And close the window, - and the birds
May take or leave them, as they will.

- Alms (from *Second April*)

Beauty never slumbers;
All is in her name;
But the rose remembers

The dust from which it came.

- Autumn Chant (from The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems</i>)

Upon this marble busy that is not I
Lay the tound, formal wreath that is not fame;
But in the forum of my silenced cry
Root ye the living tree whose sap is flame.
I, that was proud and valiant, am not more; -
Save as a dream that wanders wide and late,
Save as a wind that rattles the stout door,
Troubling the ashes in the sheltered grate.
The stone will perish; I shall be twice dust.
Only my standard on a taken hill
Can cheat the mildew and the red-brown rust
And make immortal my adventurous will.
Even now the silk is tugging at the staff:
Take up the song; forget the epitaph.

- To Inez Milholland (from The Buck in the Snow</i>)

Who lie among my tears and rust,
And all because a mortal brain
That loved to think, is clogged with dust,
And will not think again.

- The Solid Sprite Who Stands Alone (from Wine from These
Grapes</i>)

"Fountain," I have cried to that unbubbling well, "I will
not drink of thy water!" Yet I thirst
For a mouthful of - not to swallow, only to rinse my
mouth in - peace. And while the eyes of the past condemn,
The eyes of the present narrow into assignation.
And . . . worst . . .

The young are so old, they are born with their fingers
crossed; I shall get no help from them.

- "Fontaine, Je Ne Boirai Pas De Ton Eau!" (from Huntsman, What
Quarry?</i>)

Make bright the arrows,
Gather the shields:
Conquest narrows
The peaceful fields.

Stock well the quiver
With arrows bright:
The bowmen feared
Need never fight.

Make bright the arrows,
O peaceful and wise!

Gather the shields

Against surprise.

- *"Make bright the arrows" (from Make Bright the Arrows)*

They marches them out to the public square,

Two hundred men in a row;

And every step of the distance there,

Each stone in the road, each man did know,

And every alley and doorway where

As a carefree boy, not long ago,

With boys of his age he would hide and run

And shout, in the days when everyone

Was safe, and free, and school was out . . .

Not very long ago . . .

And he felt on his face the soft June air,

And thought, "This cannot be so!"

- *"They marched them out to the public square" (from The Murder of Lidice)*

For warmth alone, for shelter only

From the cold anger of the eyeless wind,

That knows my whereabouts, and mainly

To be at your door when I go down

Is abroad at all tonight in town,

I left my phrase in air, and sinned,

Laying my head against your arm

A moment, and as suddenly

Withdrawing it, and sitting there,

Warmed a little but far from warm,

And the wind still waiting at the foot of the stair,

And much harm done, and the phrase in the air.

- *For Warmth Alone, for Shelter Only (from Mine the Harvest)*

The selection also includes the complete texts of *Aria da Capo* and *Fatal Interview* , along with Millay's translations of Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil* ...

COLUMBINE: Pierrot, a macaroon,—I cannot live without a macaroon!

PIERROT: My only love, You are so intense! . . . Is it Tuesday, Columbine?— I'll kiss you if it's Tuesday.

COLUMBINE: It is Wednesday, If you must know. . . . Is this my artichoke Or yours?

PIERROT: Ah, Columbine, as if it mattered! Wednesday. . . . Will it be Tuesday, then, to-morrow, By any chance? . . .

- *Aria da Capo*

What thing is this that, built of salt and lime
And such dry motes as in the sunbeam show,
Has power upon me that do daily climb
The dustless air? - for whom those peaks of snow
Whereup the lungs of man with borrowed breath
Go labouring to a doom I may not feel,
Are but a pearled and roseate plain beneath
My winged helmet and my winged heal.
What sweet emotions neither foe nor friend
Are these that clog my flight? what thing is this
That hastening headlong to a dusty end
Dare turn upon me these proud eyes of bliss?
Up, up, my feathers! - ere I lay you by
To journey barefoot with a mortal joy.
- Fatal Interview, I

All this was long ago, but I do not forget
One small white house, between the city and the farms;
The Venus, the Pomona, - I remember yet
How in the leaves they hid their chipping plaster charms;
And the majestic sun at evening, setting late,
Behind the pane that broke and scattered his bright rays,
How like an open eye he seemed to contemplate
Our long and silent dinners with a curious gaze:
The while his golden beams, like tapers burning there,
Made splendid the serge curtains and the simple fare.
- A Memory (from Charles Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*)

Dana Jerman says

I was chatting with an aspiring poet the other night, who couldn't understand why his poetry wasn't "good". It was earnest, it was simple. It rhymed. So what's missing?

There is a multi-fasceted and involved answer to this question, but usually the best answers lie with other poets and other poetry. I should have sent him to Millay.

I should have said study the multiplicity of metaphor in *Never May The Fruit Be Plucked*. Be awed by the singularity of vision and power behind *Conscientious Objector*. Know the estrangement and longing that sit themselves among the primary traits of advanced womanhood as she presents them to us in *Assault and Wild Swans*. And the very craft of verse that can hold fast to the beautiful truths in contradictions...

"My heart is warm with friends I make,
And better friends I'll not be knowing;
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it's going."
-last stanza from "Travel"

Lew Watts says

Still haunted by "So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind..."

Andrea says

Edna St. Vincent Millay was a fascinating and mercurial individual, and her poetry reflects that. Though occasionally tending toward the maudlin, her verses contain a lot of sharp wit, biting angst, dark humor, and even, occasionally, a ray of hope. This is the perfect collection to brood with on a stormy day or when nursing a broken heart.

Jake says

Shame led me to read this book of poetry.

Here is how it went. Last November I read a blog post by Dave Cullen in which he pointed out the disparity between male and female authors receiving recognition. The column stuck with me. Fast-forward to last month as I mulled over what present to get my niece for her high school graduation. I bought her a new hardbound collegiate dictionary. But I also wanted to get her a work of prose or poetry to try out, something of proven literary merit.

My initial impulse, no lie, was to give her a copy of *Childhood's End* by the late Sci-fi master Arthur C. Clarke. I didn't feel shame about that. It's an excellent and thought-provoking novel I hope my niece does read sometime. But I realized I ought to do better than just toss her one of my "favs." I also felt a strong impulse that I should get her something by a female author. And that's when the shame hit.

Though I have read many books by women, I couldn't think of any works off the top of my head that would make good graduation gifts. The guilt began to flow when I realized that had my niece been a nephew, I could have easily listed a bevy of titles fit for any high school graduate to sample. Moreover, as the proud recipient of an English degree, I ought to be able list several female authors whose works are ideal for soon-to-be college freshman.

Then I remembered seeing the name Edna St. Vincent Millay on a friend's Goodreads Profile. So I grabbed one of Millay's collections off the shelf at Borders Bookstore, read a couple poems in the store, and quickly bought the book. If it ended up not being appropriate for my niece, at least I would improve my own reading list.

In Millay's writing, I found poems about nature, companionship, assertiveness, and even wanderlust. I especially loved one passage where Millay said in effect that she wasn't satisfied with roses--either as a romantic gift or a subject for poetry. She prized more the vitality of real human interaction. At some point, I stopped reading to see if my niece might like Millay, and just enjoyed the poetry for myself.

My goal in giving my niece this collection was not to make her a Millay fan. If she becomes one, bonus! As

a liberal arts junky I would also be tickled if she writes me this summer and says, “Uncle Jake, I did not enjoy Ms. Millay’s poetry for the following reasons...” I just wanted to extend her a sincere invitation to explore great literature as an avenue of personal development. And as she purchases books for school, most often written by men, I felt it important to make sure she starts out with a book on her shelf written by a great woman who succeeded on her own merits.

Most of the authors I read are men, and I make no apology for that. I like being a man and reading about the male experience. Not long ago I sat in a buddy's backyard and relished listening to him read masterfully the first paragraph of *Moby Dick*, a manly story indeed! But the strength in that work can be found in equal measure in the works of many female authors past and present. I thank Mr. Cullen and Ms. Millay for reminding me of that. But I also thank my niece.

Mandy says

Authoritative and comprehensive collection of Edna St Vincent Millay’s poetry, with annotations by Timothy F Jackson, and with 2 introductory essays. For all lovers and students of her poetry.

Gordon says

Vincent's good with a phrase, certainly
But these were too antiquated for me
I can only read about so many trees and flowers
You can tell she wrote sheltered in her country-house hours
But when she goes dark, there's surprising wit
Her best verse is about death, I must admit

Julie says

This book was filled with beautiful passages and stunning talent. There were a few pieces in the collection that I didn't care for, such as the Aria Da Capo, but I liked the rest of them enough to buy the book so that I can re-read it. It astounds me that someone could take words and arrange them in such a way that they cut and cry. If you aren't familiar with metrical poetry, I would recommend trying this collection as a gentle introduction. I had no idea that she was famous at such a young age! It is incredible to me that *Renascence* was written while she was a teenager.

Hippie Chick says

*My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes and oh, my friends---
It gives a lovely light!*

Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry came as a surprise to me. I had heard of her before but never read anything by her. I found her to appeal to something within me. I had just finished a book of poems by Robert Frost but found I wasn't as smitten with him as I used to be so I went looking for other poets. The name of Edna St. Vincent Millay popped up in a search of poets. so I decided to give her a try. I gather she was derided for allowing her poetry be used as Allied propaganda during World War II. Poet's were expected to be above all that.

She was born in 1892 but she was a feminist. She was the third female to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. She was also rather infamous for her many love affairs, which was something male authors did with impunity.

Her poetry spoke to my soul and I will be reading more from her.

Posted on Goodreads and Amazon

Greg says

My favorite passages:

From "Interim"

Would God

That tearing you apart would tear the thread

I strung you on! Would God – O God, my mind

Stretches asunder on this merciless rack

Of Imagery! O, let me sleep a while!

Would I could sleep, and wake to find me back

In that sweet summer afternoon with you.

Summer? 'Tis summer still by the calendar!

How easily could God, if He so willed,

Set back the world a little turn or two!-

Correct its griefs, and bring its joys again! (26)

"Blight"

Hard seeds of hate I planted

That should by now be grown,-

Rough stalks, and from thick stamens

A poisonous pollen blown,

And odours rank, unbreathable,

From dark corollas thrown!

At dawn from my damp garden

I shook the chilly dew;

The thin boughs locked behind me

That sprang to let me through;

The blossoms slept,- I sought a place

Where nothing lovely grew.

And there, when day was breaking,

I knelt and looked around:

The light was near, the silence

Was palpitant with sound;
I drew my hate from out my breast
And thrust it in the ground.

Oh, ye so fiercely tended,
Ye little seeds of hate!
I bent above your growing
Early and noon and late,
Yet are ye drooped and pitiful,--
I cannot rear ye straight!

The sun seeks out my garden,
No nook is left in shade,
No mist nor mold nor mildew
Endures on any blade,
Sweet rain slants under every bough:
Ye falter, and ye fade. (49)

From the book A Few Figs from Thistles
"First Fig"

My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends--
It gives a lovely light! (61)

"Second Fig"

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand! (61)

Two selections from "The Blue-Flag in the Bog"

God had called us, and we came;
Our loved Earth to ashes left;
Heaven was a neighbor's house,
Open flung to us, bereft.

Gay the lights of Heaven showed,
And 'twas God who walked ahead;
Yet I wept along the road,
Wanting my own house instead. (89)

....

He will set His might feet
Firmly on the sliding sand;
Like a little frightened bird
I will creep into His hand;

I will tell Him all my grief,
I will tell Him all my sin;
He will give me half His robe
For a cloak to wrap you in.

Lullaby–lullabye–“
Rocks the burnt-out planet free!–
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Reach a hand and rescue me!

Ah, the voice of love at last!
Lo, at last the face of light!
And the whole of His white robe
For a cloak against the night!

And upon my heart asleep
All the things I ever knew! –
“Holds Heaven not some cranny, Lord,
For a flower so tall and blue?”

All’s well and all’s well!
Gay the lights of Heaven show!
In some moist and Heavenly place
We will set it out to grow. (94)

Chris says

I have always loved Edna St. Vincent Millay's "My candle burns at both ends..." So when a reading challenge required that I read a book by someone who shared a first name with one of my grandparents, this seemed like a good choice. I generally don't read books of poetry, but I do enjoy poetry. Unfortunately I was terribly disappointed in these poems. They are petulant and mawkish. Many sound like something a young girl would write dealing with lost love. There are some nice phrases: "Unremembered as old rain" was one I particularly liked. But overall, none of the poems really spoke to me or made me think I had seen anything in a new light. But maybe that's because most of the selected poems are so dark.
